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THE WIND AND THE WHIRLWIND

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT

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BY

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THE WIND AND THE WHIRLWIND.

1

I HAVE a thing to say. But how to say it?
I have a cause to plead. But to what ears?
How shall I move a world by lamentation—
A world which heeded not a Nation's tears?

2

How shall I speak of justice to the aggressors,—
Of right to Kings whose rights include all wrong,—
Of truth to Statecraft, true but in deceiving,—
Of peace to Prelates, pity to the Strong?

3

Where shall I find a hearing ? In high places ?
The voice of havock drowns the voice of good.
On the throne's steps ? The elders of the nation
Rise in their ranks and call aloud for blood.

4

Where ? In the street ? Alas for the world's reason !
Not Peers not Priests alone this deed have done.
The clothes of those high Hebrews stoning Stephen
Were held by all of us,—ay every one.

5

Yet none the less I speak. Nay, here by Heaven
This task at least a poet best may do,—
To stand alone against the mighty many,
To force a hearing for the weak and few.

6

Unthanked, unhonoured,—yet a task of glory,—
Not in his day, but in an age more wise,
When those poor Chancellors have found their portion
And lie forgotten in their dust of lies.

7

And who shall say that this year's cause of freedom
Lost on the Nile has not as worthy proved
Of poet's hymning as the cause which Milton
Sang in his blindness or which Dante loved ?

8

The fall of Guelph beneath the spears of Valois,
Freedom betrayed, the Ghibelline restored,
—Have we not seen it, we who caused this anguish,
Exile and fear proscription and the sword ?

9

Or shall God less avenge in their wild valley
Where they lie slaughtered those poor sheep whose fold
In the grey twilight of our wrath we carried
To serve the worshippers of stocks and gold?

10

This fails. That finds its hour. This fights. That falters.
Greece is stamped out beneath a Wolseley's heels.
Or Egypt is avenged of her long mourning,
And hurls her Persians back to their own keels.

11

'Tis not alone the victor who is noble.
'Tis not alone the wise man who is wise.
There is a voice of sorrow in all shouting,
And shame pursues not only him who flies.

12

To fight and conquer—'tis the boast of heroes.
To fight and fly—of this men do not speak.
Yet shall there come a day when men shall tremble
Rather than do misdeeds upon the weak,—

13

—A day when statesmen baffled in their daring
Shall rather fear to wield the sword in vain
Than to give back their charge to a hurt nation,
And own their frailties, and resign their reign,—

14

—A day of wrath when all fame shall remember
Of this year's work shall be the fall of one
Who, standing foremost in her paths of virtue,
Bent a fool's knee at War's red altar stone,

15

And left all virtue beggared in his falling,
A sign to England of new griefs to come,
Her priest of peace who sold his creed for glory
And marched to carnage at the tuck of drum.

16

Therefore I fear not. Rather let this record
Stand of the past, ere God's revenge shall chase
From place to punishment His sad vicegerents
Of power on Earth.—I fling it in their face.

. . . . . .

17

I have a thing to say. But how to say it?
Out of the East a twilight had been born.
It was not day. Yet the long night was waning,
And the spent nations watched it less forlorn.

18

Out of the silence of the joyless ages
A voice had spoken, such as the first bird
Speaks to the woods, before the morning wakens,—
And the World starting to its feet had heard.

19

Men hailed it as a prophecy. Its utterance
Was in that tongue divine the Orient knew.
It spoke of hope. Men hailed it as a brother's.
It spoke of happiness. Men deemed it true.

20

There in the land of Death, where toil is cradled,
That tearful Nile, unknown to Liberty,
It spoke in passionate tones of human freedom,
And of those rights of Man which cannot die,—

21

—Till from the cavern of long fear, whose portals
Had backward rolled, and hardly yet aloud,
Men prisoned stole like ghosts and joined the chorus,
And chaunted trembling, each man in his shroud.

22

Justice and peace, the brotherhood of nations,—
Love and goodwill of all mankind to man,—
These were the words they caught and echoed strangely,
Deeming them portions of some Godlike plan,—

23

A plan thus first to their own land imparted.
They did not know the irony of Fate,
The mockery of man's freedom, and the laughter
Which greets a brother's love from those that hate.

24

Oh for the beauty of hope's dreams! The childhood
Of that old land, long impotent in pain,
Cast off its slough of sorrow with its silence,
And laughed and shouted and grew new again.

25

And in the streets, where still the shade of Pharaoh
Stalked in his sons, the Mamelukian horde,
Youth greeted youth with words of exultation
And shook his chains and clutched as for a sword.

26

Student and merchant,—Jew, and Copt, and Moslem,—
All whose scarred backs had bent to the same rod,—
Fired with one mighty thought, their feuds forgotten,
Stood hand in hand and praising the same God.

27

I have a thing to say. But how to say it ?
As in the days of Moses in the land,
God sent a man of prayer before his people
To speak to Pharaoh, and to loose his hand.

28

Injustice, that hard step-mother of heroes,
Had taught him justice. Him the sight of pain
Moved into anger, and the voice of weeping
Made his eyes weep as for a comrade slain.

29

A soldier in the bands of his proud masters
It was his lot to serve. But of his soul
None owned allegiance save the Lord of Armies.
No worship from his God's might him cajole.

30

Strict was his service. In the law of Heaven
He comfort took and patience under wrong.
And all men loved him for his heart unquailing,
And for the words of pity on his tongue.

31

Knowledge had come to him in the night-watches,
And strength with fasting, eloquence with prayer.
He stood a Judge from God before the strangers,
The one just man among his people there.

32

Strongly he spoke: 'Now, Heaven be our witness!
'Egypt this day has risen from her sleep.
'She has put off her mourning and her silence.
'It was no law of God that she should weep.

33

'It was no law of God nor of the Nations

'That in this land, alone of the fair Earth,

'The hand that sowed should reap not of its labour,

'The heart that grieved should profit not of mirth.

34

'How have we suffered at the hands of strangers,

'Binding their sheaves, and harvesting their wrath!

'Our service has been bitter, and our wages

'Hunger and pain and nakedness and drouth.

35

'Which of them pitied us? Of all our princes,

'Was there one Sultan listened to our cry?

'Their palaces we built, their tombs, their temples.

'What did they build but tombs for Liberty?

36

'To live in ignorance, to die by service;

'To pay our tribute and our stripes receive:

'This was the ransom of our toil in Eden,

'This, and our one sad liberty—to grieve.

37

'We have had enough of strangers and of princes

'Nursed on our knees and lords within our house.

'The bread which they have eaten was our children's,

'For them the feasting and the shame for us.

38

'The shadow of their palaces, fair dwellings

'Built with our blood and kneaded with our tears,

'Darkens the land with darkness of Gehennem,

'The lust, the crime, the infamy of years.

39

'Did ye not hear it? From those muffled windows

'A sound of women rises and of mirth.

'These are our daughters—ay our sons—in prison,

'Captives to shame with those who rule the Earth.

40

'The silent river by those gardens lapping

'To-night receives its burden of new dead,

'A man of age sent home with his lord's wages,

'Stones to his feet, a grave-cloth to his head.

41

'Walls infamous in beauty, gardens fragrant

'With rose and citron and the scent of blood.

'God shall blot out the memory of all laughter,

'Rather than leave you standing where you stood.

42

'We have had enough of princes and of strangers,

'Slaves that were Sultans, eunuchs that were kings,

'The shame of Sodom is on all their faces.

'The curse of Cain pursues them, and it clings.

43

'Is there no virtue? See the pale Greek smiling.

'Virtue for him is as a tale of old.

'Which be his gods? The cent. per cent. in silver.

'His God of gods? The world's creator, Gold.

44

'The Turk that plunders and the Frank that panders,

'These are our lords who ply with lust and fraud.

'The brothel and the winepress and the dancers

'Are gifts unneeded in the lands of God.

45

'We need them not. We heed them not. Our faces

'Are turned to a new Kebla, a new truth,

'Proclaimed by the one God of all the nations

'To save His people and renew their youth.

46

'A truth which is of knowledge and of reason;

'Which teaches men to mourn no more and live;

'Which tells them of things good as well as evil,

'And gives what Liberty alone can give.

47

'The counsel to be strong, the will to conquer,

'The love of all things just and kind and wise,

'Freedom for slaves, fair rights for all as brothers,

'The triumph of things true, the scorn of lies.

48

'O men, who are my brethren, my soul's kindred!

'That which our fathers dreamed of as a dream,

'The sun of peace and justice, has arisen

'And God shall work in you His perfect scheme.

49

'The rulers of your Earth shall cease deceiving,

'The men of usury shall fly your land.

'Your princes shall be numbered with your servants,

'And peace shall guide the sword in your right hand.

50

'You shall become a nation with the nations.

'Lift up your voices, for the night is past.

'Stretch forth your hands. The hands of the free peoples

'Have beckoned you the youngest and the last.

51

'And in the brotherhood of Man reposing,

'Joined to their hopes and nursed in their new day,

'The anguish of the years shall be forgotten

'And God, with these, shall wipe your tears away.'

52

I have a thing to say. But how to say it?
How shall I tell the mystery of guile—
The fraud that fought—the treason that disbanded—
The gold that slew the children of the Nile?

53

The ways of violence are hard to reckon,
And men of right grow feeble in their will,
And Virtue of her sons has been forsaken,
And men of peace have turned aside to kill.

54

How shall I speak of them, the priests of Baal,
The men who sowed the wind for their ill ends?
The reapers of the whirlwind in that harvest
Were all my countrymen, were some my friends.

55

Friends, countrymen and lovers of fair freedom—
Souls to whom still my soul laments and cries.
I would not tell the shame of your false dealings,
Save for the blood which clamours to the skies.

56

A curse on Statecraft, not on you my Country!
The men you slew were not more foully slain
Than was your honour at their hands you trusted.
They died, you conquered,—both alike in vain.

57

Crimes find accomplices, and Murder weapons.
The ways of Statesmen are an easy road.
All swords are theirs, the noblest with the neediest.
And those who serve them best are men of good.

58

What need to blush, to trifle with dissembling?
A score of honest tongues anon shall swear.
Blood flows. The Senate's self shall spread its mantle
In the world's face, nor own a Cæsar there.

59

'Silence! Who spoke?' 'The voice of one disclosing
'A truth untimely.' 'With what right to speak?
'Holds he the Queen's commission?' 'No, God's only.'
A hundred hands shall smite him on the cheek.

60

The 'truth' of Statesmen is the thing they publish,
Their 'falsehood' the thing done they do not say,
Their 'honour' what they win from the world's trouble,
Their 'shame' the 'ay' which reasons with their 'nay.'

61

Alas for Liberty, alas for Egypt!

What chance was yours in this ignoble strife?

Scorned and betrayed, dishonoured and rejected,

What was there left you but to fight for life?

62

The men of honour sold you to dishonour.

The men of truth betrayed you with a kiss.

Your strategy of love too soon outplotted,

What was there left you of your dreams but this?

63

You thought to win a world by your fair dealing,

To conquer freedom with no drop of blood.

This was your crime. The world knows no such reasoning.

It neither bore with you nor understood.

64

Your Pharaoh with his chariots and his dancers,
Him they could understand as of their kin.
He spoke in their own tongue and as their servant,
And owned no virtue they could call a sin.

65

They took him for his pleasure and their purpose.
They fashioned him as clay to their own pride.
His name they made a cudgel to your hurting,
His treachery a spear-point to your side.

66

They knew him, and they scorned him and upheld him.
They strengthened him with honours and with ships.
They used him as a shadow for seditions.
They stabbed you with the lying of his lips.

Sad Egypt! Since that night of misadventure

Which slew your first-born for your Pharaoh's crime

No plague like this has God decreed against you,

No punishment of all foredoomed in Time.

68

I have a thing to say. Oh how to say it!
One summer morning, at the hour of prayer,
And in the face of Man and Man's high Maker,
The thunder of their cannon rent the air.

69

The flames of death were on you and destruction.
A hail of iron on your heads they poured.
You fought, you fell, you died until the sunset;
And then you fled forsaken of the Lord.

70

I care not if you fled. What men call courage
Is the least noble thing of which they boast.
Their victors always are great men of valour.
Find me the valour of the beaten host!

71

It may be you were cowards. Let them prove it,—
What matter? Were you women in the fight,
Your courage were the greater that a moment
You steeled your weakness in the cause of right.

72

Oh I would rather fly with the first craven
Who flung his arms away in your good cause,
Than head the hottest charge by England vaunted
In all the record of her unjust wars.

73

Poor sheep! they scattered you. Poor slaves! they bowed you.
You prayed for your dear lives with your mute hands.
They answered you with laughter and with shouting,
And slew you in your thousands on the sands.

74

They led you with arms bound to your betrayer—
His slaves, they said, recaptured for his will.
They bade him to take heart and fill his vengeance.
They gave him his lost sword that he might kill.

75

They filled for him his dungeons with your children.
They chartered him new gaolers from strange shores.
The Arnaout and the Cherkess for his minions,
Their soldiers for the sentries at his doors.

76

He plied you with the whip, the rope, the thumb-screw.
They plied you with the scourging of vain words.
He sent his slaves, his eunuchs, to insult you.
They sent you laughter on the lips of Lords.

77

They bound you to the pillar of their firmans.
They placed for sceptre in your hand a pen.
They cast lots for the garments of your treaties,
And brought you naked to the gaze of men.

78

They called on your High Priest for your death mandate.
They framed indictments on you from your laws.
For him men loved they offered a Barabbas.
They washed their hands and found you without cause.

79

They scoffed at you and pointed in derision,
Crowned with their thorns and nailed upon their tree.
And at your head their Pilate wrote the inscription—
'This is the land restored to Liberty.'

80

Oh insolence of strength! Oh boast of wisdom!
Oh poverty in all things truly wise!
Thinkest thou, England, God can be outwitted
For ever thus by him who sells and buys?

81

Thou sellest the sad nations to their ruin.
What hast thou bought? The child within the womb,
The son of him thou slayest to thy hurting,
Shall answer thee 'an Empire for thy tomb.'

82

Thou hast joined house to house for thy perdition.
Thou hast done evil in the name of right.
Thou hast made bitter sweet and the sweet bitter,
And called light darkness and the darkness light.

83

Thou art become a bye-word for dissembling,
A beacon to thy neighbours for all fraud.
Thy deeds of violence men count and reckon.
Who takes the sword shall perish by the sword.

84

Thou hast deserved men's hatred. They shall hate thee.
Thou hast deserved men's fear. Their fear shall kill.
Thou hast thy foot upon the weak. The weakest
With his bruised head shall strike thee on the heel.

85

Thou wentest to this Egypt for thy pleasure.
Thou shalt remain with her for thy sore pain.
Thou hast possessed her beauty. Thou wouldst leave her.
Nay. Thou shalt lie with her as thou hast lain.

86

She shall bring shame upon thy face with all men.
She shall disease thee with her grief and fear.
Thou shalt grow sick and feeble in her ruin.
Thou shalt repay her to the last sad tear.

87

Her kindred shall surround thee with strange clamours,
Dogging thy steps till thou shalt loathe their din.
The friends thou hast deceived shall watch in anger.
Thy children shall upbraid thee with thy sin.

88

All shall be counted thee a crime,—thy patience
With thy impatience. Thy best thought shall wound.
Thou shalt grow weary of thy work thus fashioned,
And walk in fear with eyes upon the ground.

89

The Empire thou didst build shall be divided.
Thou shalt be weighed in thine own balances
Of usury to peoples and to princes,
And be found wanting by the world and these.

90

They shall possess the lands by thee forsaken
And not regret thee. On their seas no more
Thy ships shall bear destruction to the nations,
Or thy guns thunder on a fenceless shore.

91

Thou hadst no pity in thy day of triumph.
These shall not pity thee. The world shall move
On its high course and leave thee to thy silence,
Scorned by the creatures that thou couldst not love.

92

Thy Empire shall be parted, and thy kingdom.
At thy own doors a kingdom shall arise,
Where freedom shall be preached and the wrong righted
Which thy unwisdom wrought in days unwise.

93

Truth yet shall triumph in a world of justice.
This is of faith. I swear it. East and west
The law of Man's progression shall accomplish
Even this last great marvel with the rest.

94

Thou wouldst not further it. Thou canst not hinder.
If thou shalt learn in time thou yet shalt live.
But God shall ease thy hand of its dominion,
And give to these the rights thou wouldst not give.

95

The nations of the East have left their childhood.
Thou art grown old. Their manhood is to come;
And they shall carry on Earth's high tradition
Through the long ages when thy lips are dumb,

96

Till all shall be wrought out. O Lands of weeping,
Lands watered by the rivers of old Time,
Ganges and Indus and the streams of Eden,
Yours is the future of the world's sublime.

97

Yours was the fount of man's first inspiration,
The well of wisdom whence he earliest drew.
And yours shall be the flood-time of his reason,
The stream of strength which shall his strength renew.

98

The wisdom of the West is but a madness,
The fret of shallow waters in their bed.
Yours is the flow, the fulness of Man's patience
The ocean of God's rest inherited.

99

And thou too, Egypt, mourner of the nations,
Though thou hast died to-day in all men's sight,
And though upon thy cross with thieves thou hangest,
Yet shall thy wrong be justified in right.

100

'Twas meet one man should die for the whole people.
Thou wert the victim chosen to retrieve
The sorrows of the Earth with full deliv'rance.
And, as thou diest, these shall surely live.

101

Thy prophets have been scattered through the cities.
The seed of martyrdom thy sons have sown
Shall make of thee a glory and a witness
In all men's hearts held captive with thine own.

102

Thou shalt not be forsaken in thy children.
Thy righteous blood shall fructify the Earth.
The virtuous of all lands shall be thy kindred,
And death shall be to thee a better birth.

103

Therefore I do not grieve. Oh hear me, Egypt!
Even in death thou art not wholly dead.
And hear me, England! Nay. Thou needs must hear me.
I had a thing to say. And it is said.

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